

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Johnson, ranking member Antonio and members of the committee, my name is Nikki McCarthy and I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 238 which would license the practice of art and music therapy in Ohio. Thank you for considering my testimony today. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Senators Kenny Yuko and Andrew Brenner for sponsoring this legislation.

By way of background, I am the Founder and Executive Director of Sam's Fans, an organization named for my daughter that is dedicated to providing and enhancing music and art therapy programs that serve seriously ill children and their families. Our organization has donated over over \$300k to Ohio six of the seven Ohio Children's Hospitals, countless art supplies and musical instruments and served more than 300 children since its founding in 2015 . More importantly, and the thing I am most proud of, is that I am the mother of Samantha McCarthy and her three brothers. I am all their biggest fan.

When Sam was in the second grade, her teacher noticed that she looked a little pale. You would think that as a parent I would have noticed that but, as some of you may be able to appreciate, with a 7, 5, and 2 year old in the house you can miss some things. We took Sam to our pediatrician and had some routine blood work done. Our doctor didn't seem too concerned and neither were we frankly. We jokingly referred to Sam as "the Mule" because she never got sick. That changed when we got a call in the evening from the doctor's office telling us to be at the hospital first thing in the morning. We soon learned that the reason that Sam looked pale was because her bone marrow was failing. Sam was subsequently diagnosed with an extremely rare, and nearly always fatal, genetic disease called Fanconi Anemia.

Fortunately for us, one of the three hospitals in the country that care for kids with FA is Cincinnati Children's Hospital. We learned at our first visit that our goal was to put off a bone marrow transplant for as long as we could because the survivability rate for kids with FA was less than 50% at the time. Sam knew she had a serious disease and did everything she needed to do to stave off a transplant including participating in clinical trials and enduring more needles than any kid, or adult, should ever have to. For three years Sam lived her life like any other girl her age but when she turned 10 a transplant became inevitable. The next 14 months of her life

were spent in transplant units or, if she was home, separated from her friends or any outside visitors.

A word about a bone marrow transplant unit. It is a place like no other. Patients are confined to their rooms for weeks and months at a time. It is cold and sterile. One of the few things you have to look forward to is a rotation in your room assignment so you get a different outside wall to stare at or, when you were really lucky, you got a window that actually opened up to the sky outside. The only visitors are immediate family, as in just parents - no little brothers. The only folks who come in and out of the room are hospital staff. Nurses, doctors, practitioners, PCAs, etc. These people are highly skilled and are there to handle a child's medical needs and if you are not familiar with a bone marrow transplant, the needs are endless.

But there are other people who are trained to attend to a child's emotional and mental well being while they are on the unit - needs that are just as numerous as a child's physical needs. Those were our music and art therapists. And although the doctors were not able to save Sam's life, the music and art therapists saved Sam's life while she was in the hospital.

Let me say that again, music therapy saved Sam's life - even when she knew she was going to die. That is a very serious responsibility to be given in a child's life.

One of the most impactful people we encountered during the time between our initial diagnosis and Sam's death was our music therapist, Brian Schreck at CCHMC. When Sam wanted to celebrate a good day and play happy music on her phone he was there. When she wanted to continue her piano lessons he was there. When Sam suffered a seizure and a trip to the ICU she woke up and remembered one thing: that Brian had come into her room and played music for her. When she was gone and we have just one recording of her voice singing a beloved song, he was the one who did that for her and for us. Brian gave Sam the ability to express herself through music therapy. He eased her anxiety through his music therapy. He assisted in difficult procedures by distracting her with music therapy and encouraged her to be more physical by using her hands and arms when she was weak by playing musical instruments. He helped her work through the difficult feelings of isolation and frustration of being sick through song writing during sessions of music therapy. These are just our experiences. Every day there are hundreds more just like Brian all over Ohio who are helping children from the tiniest babies in the NICU to patients with alzheimers.

These are highly trained individuals, trained not only as a professional musician, but also are required to study areas of anatomy, psychology, counseling, special education and geriatrics to name a few. They are required to continue their education beyond school to ensure that are up to date on the most research supported beneficial interventions as to provide the highest quality care to their patients. In the medical setting, music and art therapists must be versatile

to meet the ever changing needs of their patients, often requiring in the moment assessment, treatment planning, and implementation

Because music and art therapists are highly trained and certified healthcare professionals, they are required to know, understand and follow things like HIPAA, to ensure confidentiality, infection control precautions, so important in the age of COVID19, warning signs and safety protocols for working with patients and families who are experiencing severe crises of pain, suicidal ideation, end of life or life altering diagnoses, and many more.

That is why making sure that these therapists are held to the highest standards possible through licensure is critical.

You would not want a doctor who is responsible for your child's physical well being to not be held to the highest standards any more than you want an individual who is dealing with a medically and emotionally fragile child to be held to those same high standards.

This is not babysitting, it is not arts and crafts, it is about healing and caring for the soul and the psyche of a sick child.

After Sam's death we were so impacted that we started a foundation solely dedicated to providing and enhancing music and art therapy programs that serve seriously ill children and their families.

On behalf of families that we help by providing these critical therapies all over Ohio, I respectfully ask that you strongly consider voting in favor of Senate Bill 238. I would be happy to answer any questions.